THE GENERAL FEATURES OF A MASJID

(All images contained in this document are designed in a manner that is not intended to recreate the creation of Allah!)

GENERAL FEATURES OF A MASJID:

The first masajid of the Muslims were those built in al-Madinah al-Munawwarah (Medina, a city near Makkah, in today's Saudi Arabia); namely, Masjid al-Quba and Al-Masjid al-Nabawi (The Prophet's Mosque).

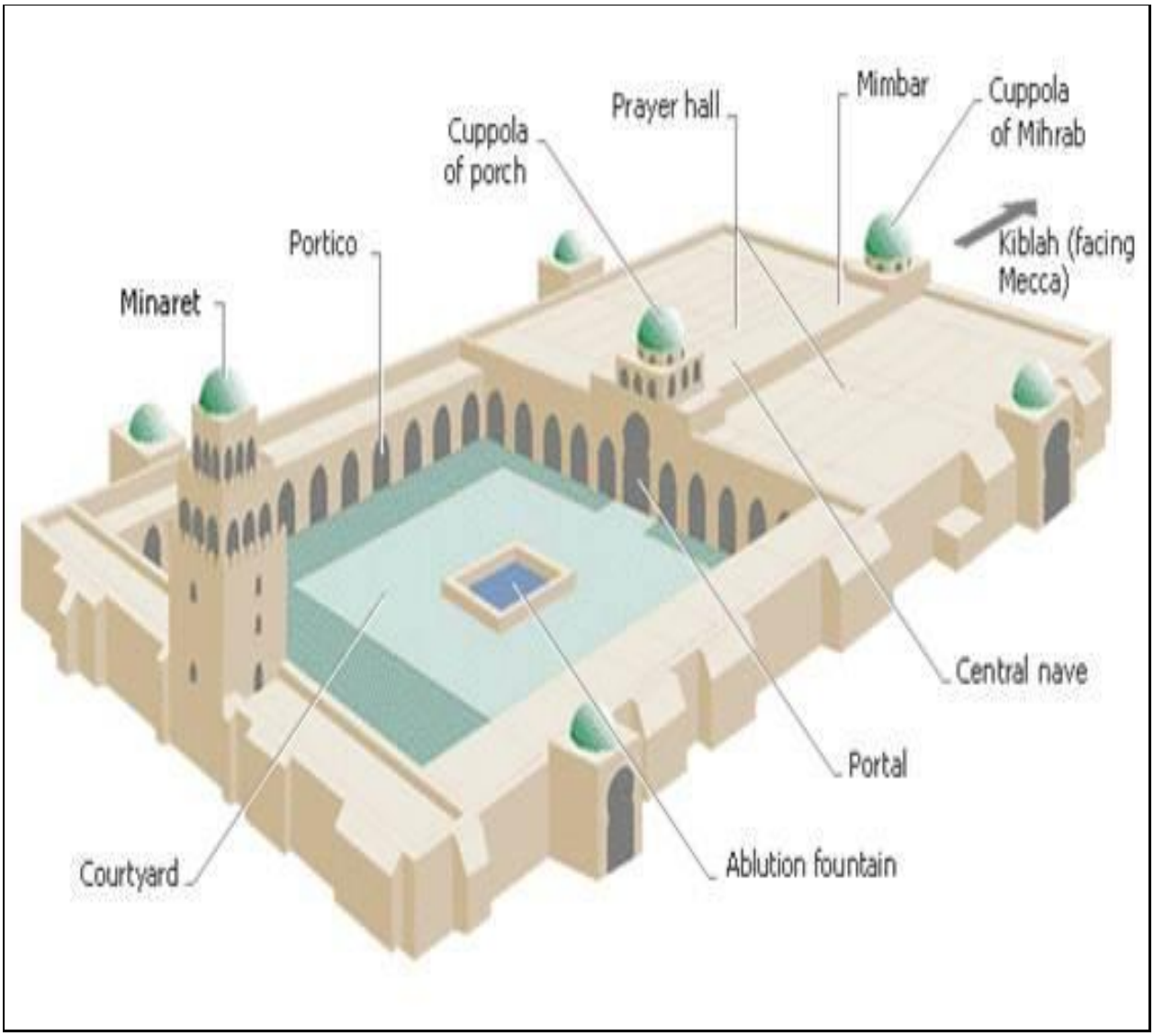
An artists rendering of the original mosque

HTTP://MUSLIMMATTERS.ORG/2013/05/24/9-THINGS-YOU-DIDNT-KNOW-ABOUT-THE-PROPHETS-MOSQUE/

These masajid were built during the Prophet's (P.B.U.H.) lifetime and were made of mud bricks, tree trunks, and leaves, etc. They were not equipped with Domes, Minarets, carpet, or marbled tiles. They were extremely simple and constructed solely for the purpose of worshipping Allah.

All masajid are basically modeled after Al-Masjid al-Nabawi. The original Prophet's Mosque was built by the Prophet Mohammed (P.B.U.H.) himself, next to the house where he settled after his Hijrah (emigration) to Medina in 622 AD. The original building was a simple open-air square enclosure of 30x35 meters. The masjid was equipped with a minbar (pulpit) from where the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) addressed his followers. The masjid had columns made of date palm trunks, mud walls, and a thatched roof. The structure contained the rooms of his wives (RA), and was accessed through three doors; namely, Bab Rahmah to the south, Bab Jibril to the west and Bab al-Nisa' to the east. Across the courtyard from the minbar was a covered area where his followers could find shade. Bilal ibn Rabah, the first muezzin would climb to the roof of the masjid to better project his voice when calling the Azan to assemble the Muslims for prayer.

THE MAIN FEATURES OF A MASJID:



Virtually all masjid around the globe have common features; however, these features are not all inclusive. Among the common features are a minbar, a prayer hall, an ablution station, a muezzin to call the azan, a mihrab, a courtyard, and a minaret. Beyond these common characteristics, however, masajid vary greatly from place to place.

MINBAR:

During the lifetime of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) he used to hold a stick and sit upon a tree stump called Nahayu (date tree) whenever he delivered a Khutba (Sermon). However, after some time his companions proposed he use a better pulpit. The minbar they introduced was a wooden one made of tamarisk with three steps. Furthermore, after the minbar was introduced, the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) stopped holding a stick unless he was delivering a sermon in an open area. The evidence for these findings is the hadith of Bukhari wherein Abu Haazim reported: **"A group of people came to Sahl ibn Sa'd, and they had differed concerning the minbar and what kind of wood it was made of. He said: 'By Allah, I know what kind of wood it is made of, and who made it, and I saw the Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H.) the first day he sat on it.' I said to him: 'O Abu 'Abbas, tell us.' He said: 'The**

Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H.) sent word to a woman of the Ansar, saying: 'Let your carpenter slave make me something of wood from which I may speak to the people.' So he made these three steps, then the Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H.) ordered that it be placed in this spot. It was made of tamarisk wood from al-Ghaabah (a wooded area near Medina).'"

In essence, the minbar is a stair case leading to a small platform that is placed on the right side of the mihrab (niche specifying the qibla) from which the Imam (prayer leader) addresses the congregation during the khutbah, etc.

The Imam delivers his address from the lower step of the minbar while the top part remains empty.

At the completion of the khutbah, the Imam descends the minbar and enters the mihrab to lead the salat. The minbar is traditionally made of richly carved wood; however, some masajid present them adorned with veneers of mother of pearl, ivory, limestone, etc.

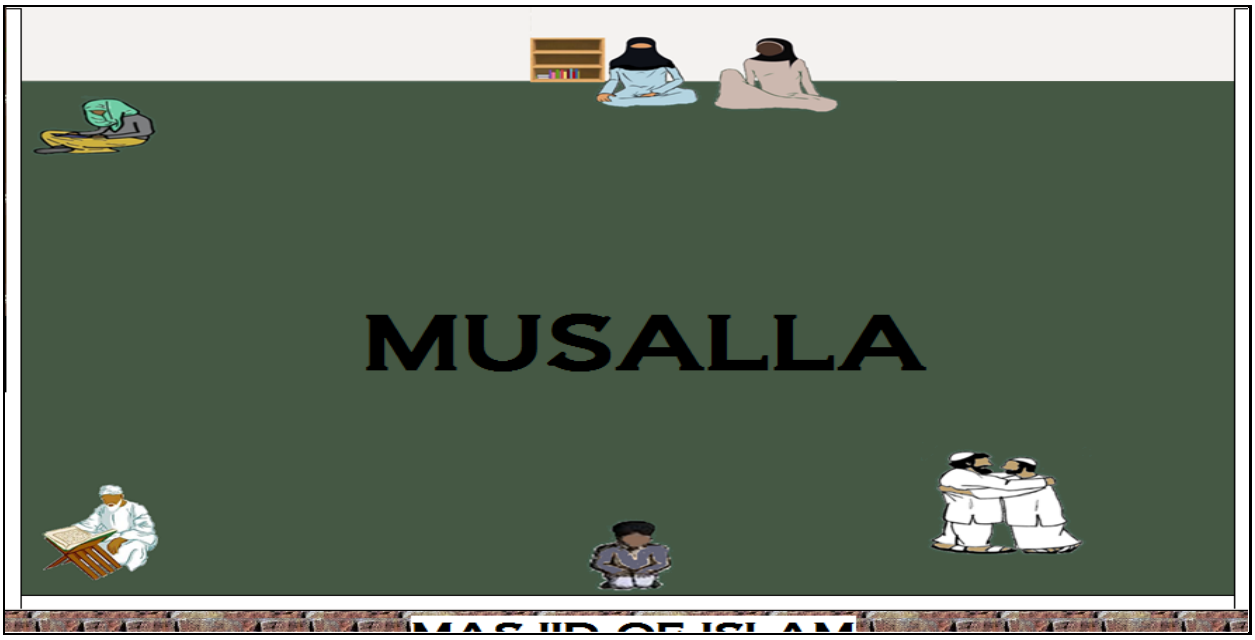
It is also important to note that there are authentic ahadith which clearly demonstrate that the Prophet Mohammed (P.B.U.H.) did not deliver the Eid khutbah standing atop of the minbar. Therefore, the use of a minbar is not obligatory. The evidence for this ruling is the hadith of Bukhari wherein Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri reportedly said: "The Messenger of Allah

(P.B.U.H.) used to come out on the day of al-Fitr and al-Adha to the prayer place, and the first thing he would do was to offer the prayer. **Then when he finished the prayer, he would stand facing the people, whilst the people were still sitting in their rows, and he would exhort them, and advise them and instruct them. If he wanted to send out a military detachment, he would do so, or if he wanted to issue some instructions, he would do so, then he would leave**..."

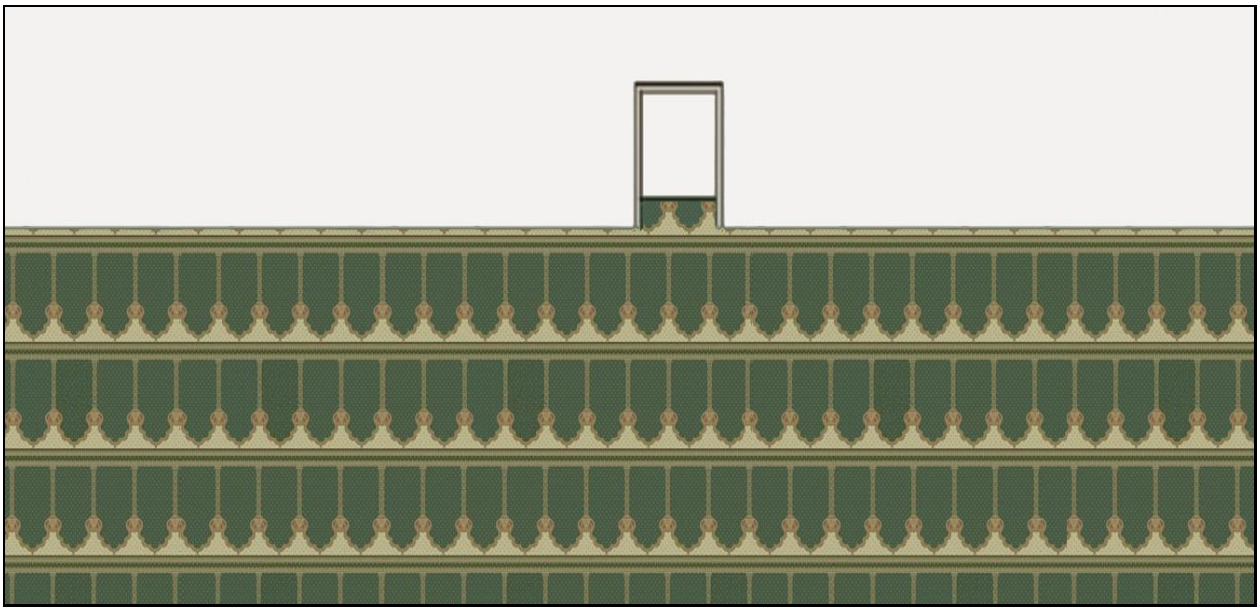
MUSALLA (PRAYER HALL):

The musalla is an open and uncluttered internal section of the masjid where the khutbah is performed and the worshiper performs salat.

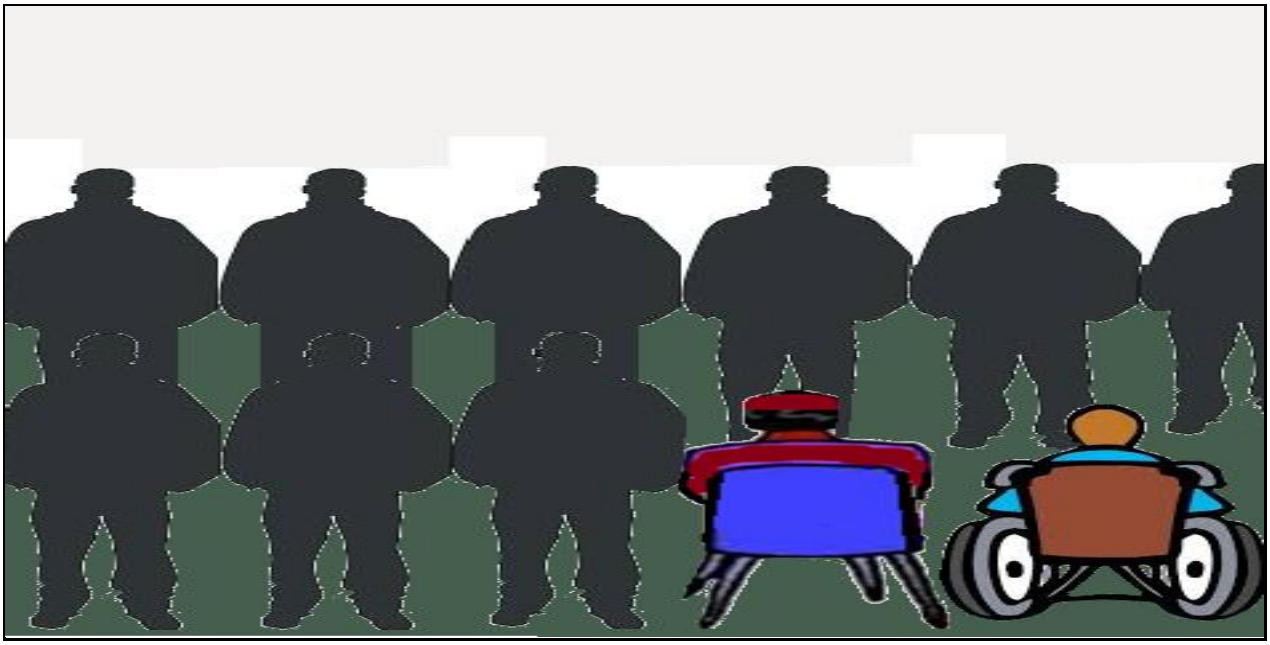
Members of the congregation sit on the floor which is usually carpeted.



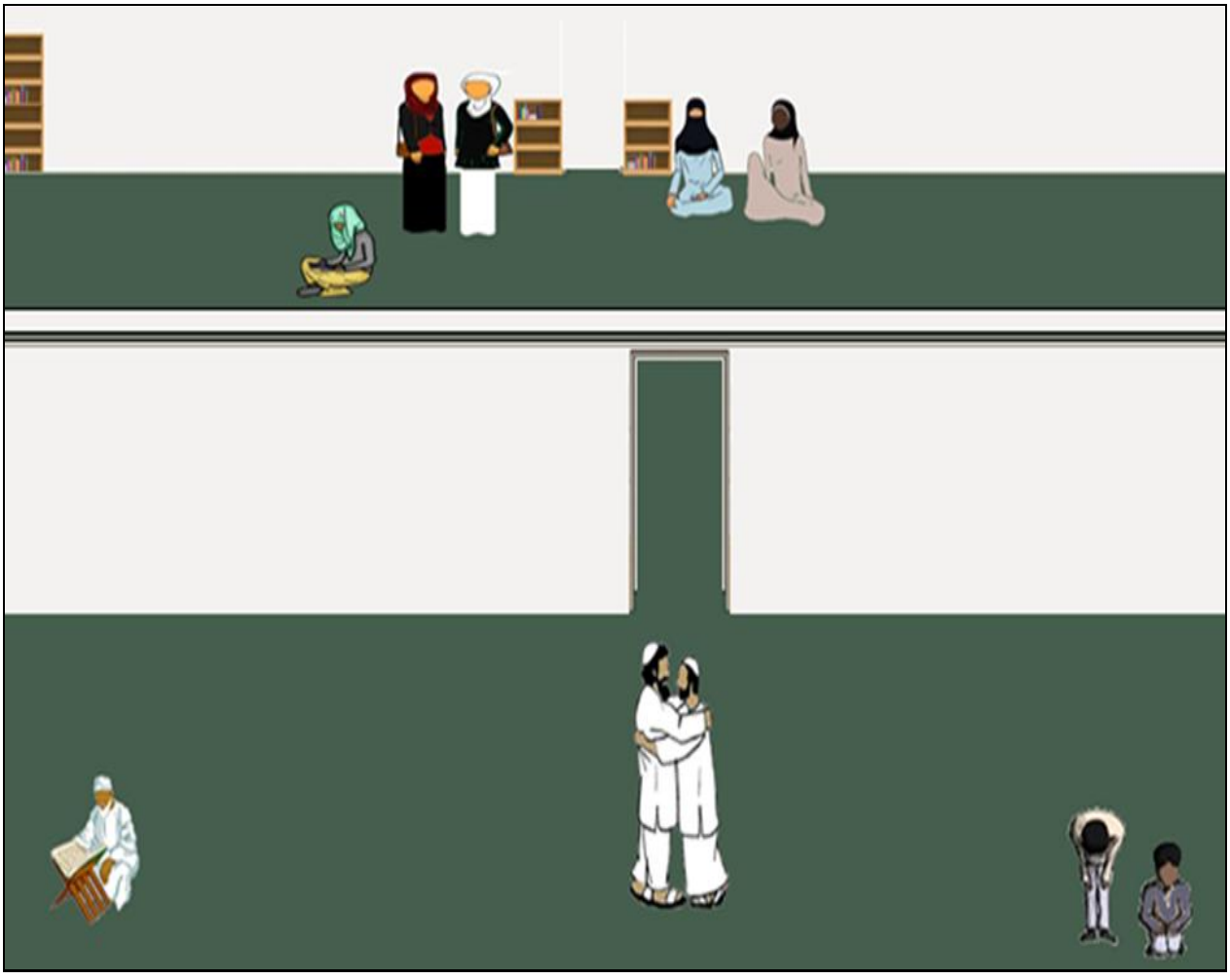
Ideally, the flooring is of a basic color. However, patters and lines for rows are permissible provided they are not distracting to worshipers.



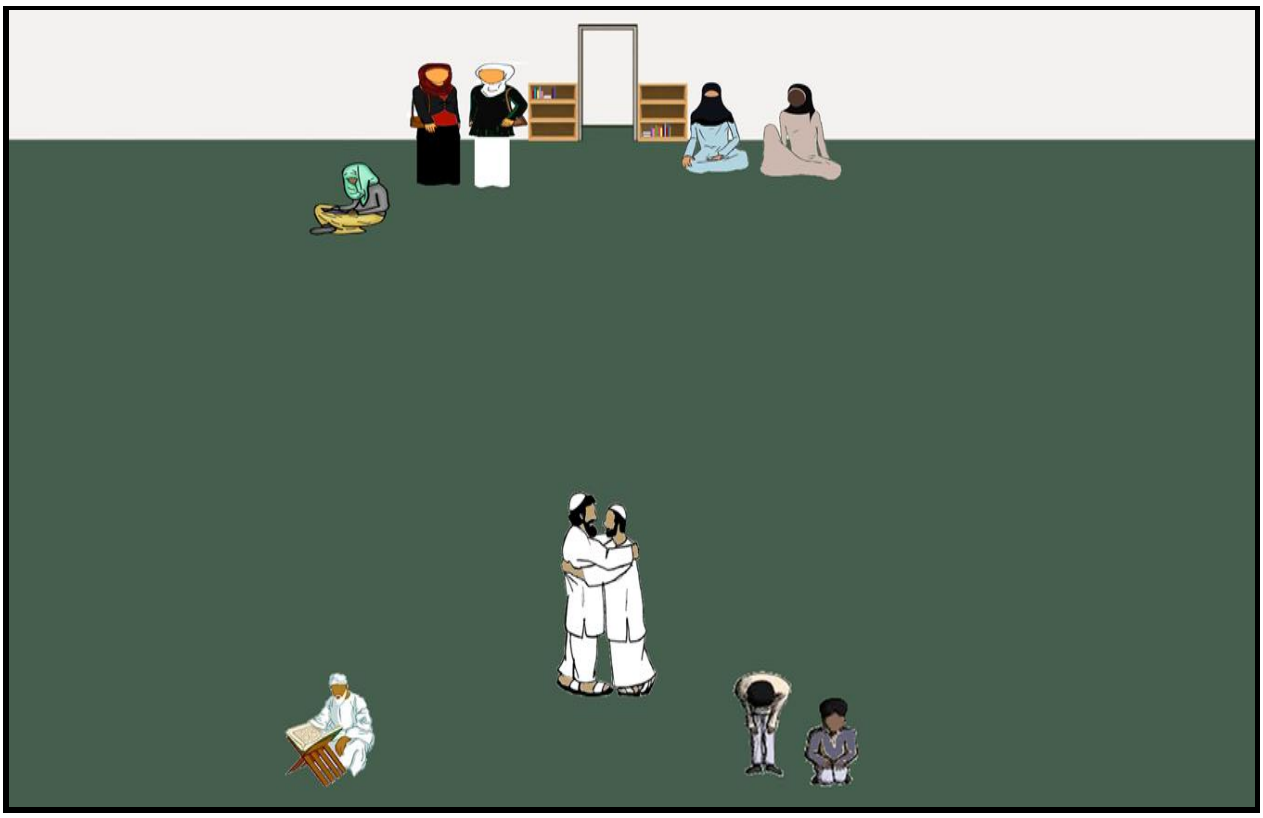
There are also no permanent pews or chairs positioned inside of the musalla. This is due to the fact that worshipers require adequate room to perform the ritual prayer and prostrate themselves. However, chairs can be temporarily placed in this area for the benefit of those members with special needs.



The congregation inside of the musalla is segregated with males positioned in the front near the Imam and females to the rear. Furthermore, because it is forbidden for men and women to stand together in salat, a number of masajid equip their musalla with a partition to separate the males from the females; thus forming two prayer areas within the prayer hall.



Other masajid generally accommodate males and females in the same musalla, with the worshippers dividing themselves by creating a gap of open space between them.



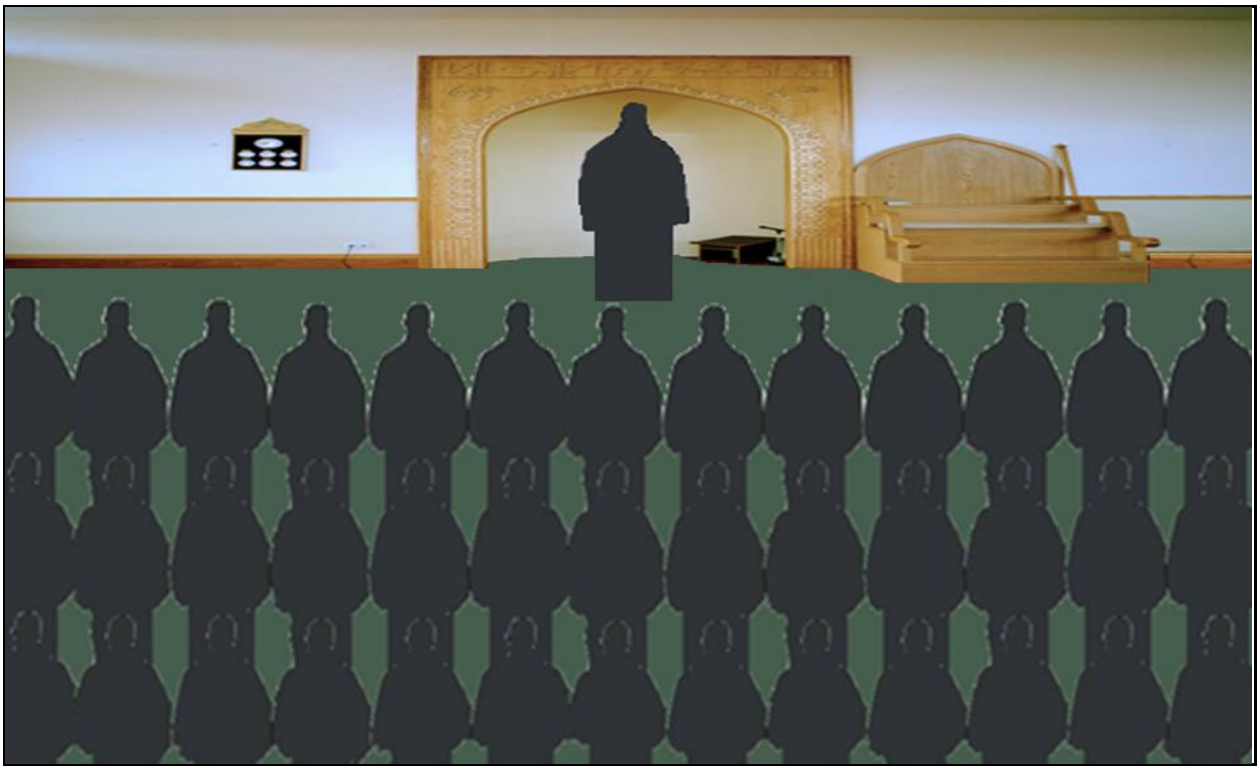
Lastly, some masajid have separate rooms for the female members equipped with video screens that are designed to broadcast the khutbah for their viewing pleasure.

The evidence for the musalla being a part of the masjid is the hadith of Bukhari wherein Sahl (bin Sa'd) reported: "**The distance between the Musalla of Allah's Apostle (P.B.U.H.) and the wall was just sufficient for a sheep to pass through.**"

MIHRAB:

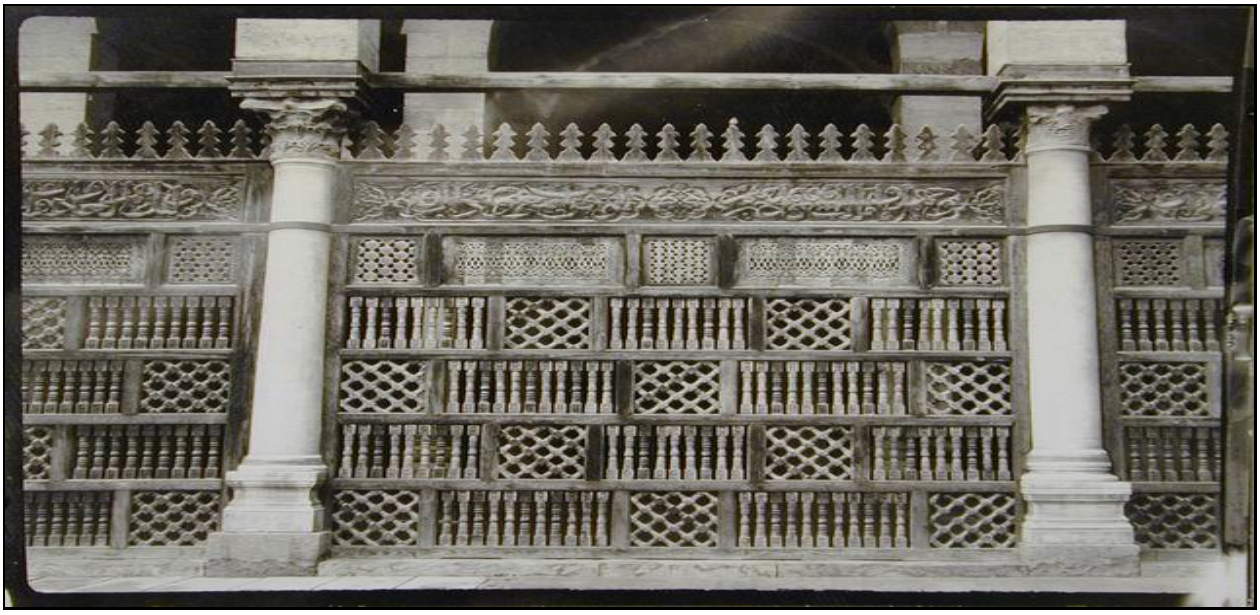
The mihrab is a common feature found in a number of masajid. The mihrab is an uncluttered niche in the wall of the musalla designed to specify the direction of the qibla. A mirhab can vary a great deal in size and color; however, they are customarily arch shaped like a doorway and are adorned with distinctly decorated tiles, calligraphy, etc. The musalla did not exist during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) or during the reign of the rightly guided caliphs (Rashidun Caliphate). Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz was the first to utilize a mihrab. He ordered al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malak, the governor of Madina to install one within Al-Masjid al-Nabawi when it was rebuilt.

After the maqsura was introduced into the general plan of the masjid, the mihrab assumed its present form of a concave niche. The mihrab is where the Imam stands while delivering the khutbah or leading the worshipers in salat. In essence before microphones and sound systems, the mihrab served as an acoustic device which amplified the voice of the Imam during the congregational prayer. Nowadays, a number masajid are equipped with both a mihrab and microphone sound systems.



It is also important to note that Islamic jurists have debated over the permissibility of placing a mihrab within a masjid. The majority of the jurists consider it permissible. However, the Shafi madhab view the feature as reprehensible.

MAQSURA:



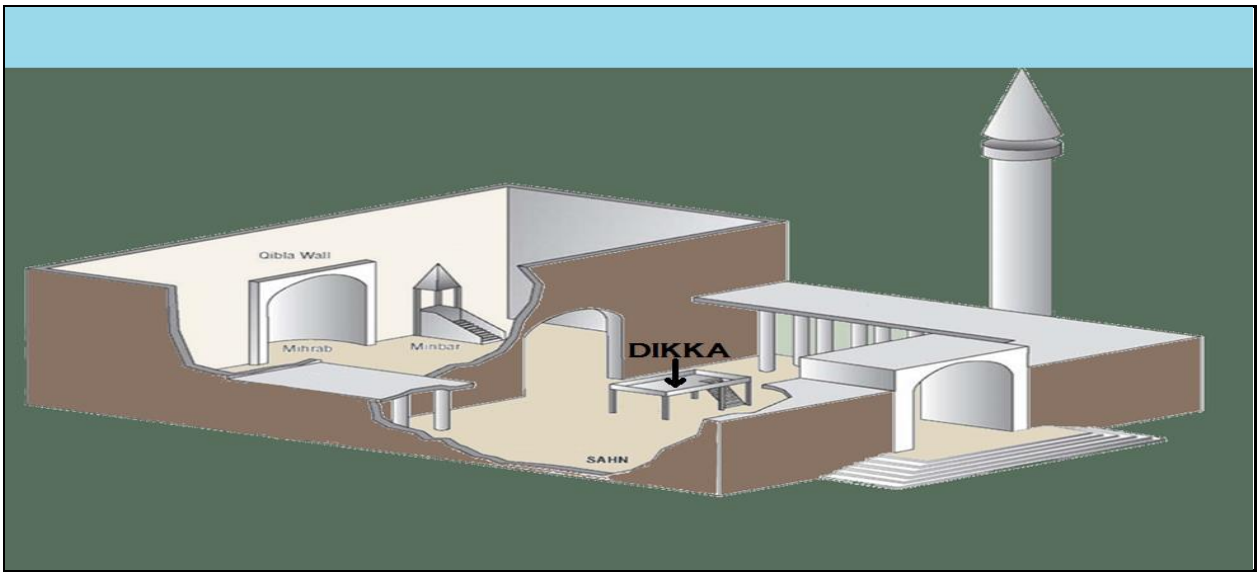
The maqsura is another structural detail typical of some but not all masajid. The maqsura is a screen or enclosure positioned around the mihrab to protect the Imam during worship services.

Allegedly, the maqsura was introduced as a barrier to safeguard the life of the calif from assassins.

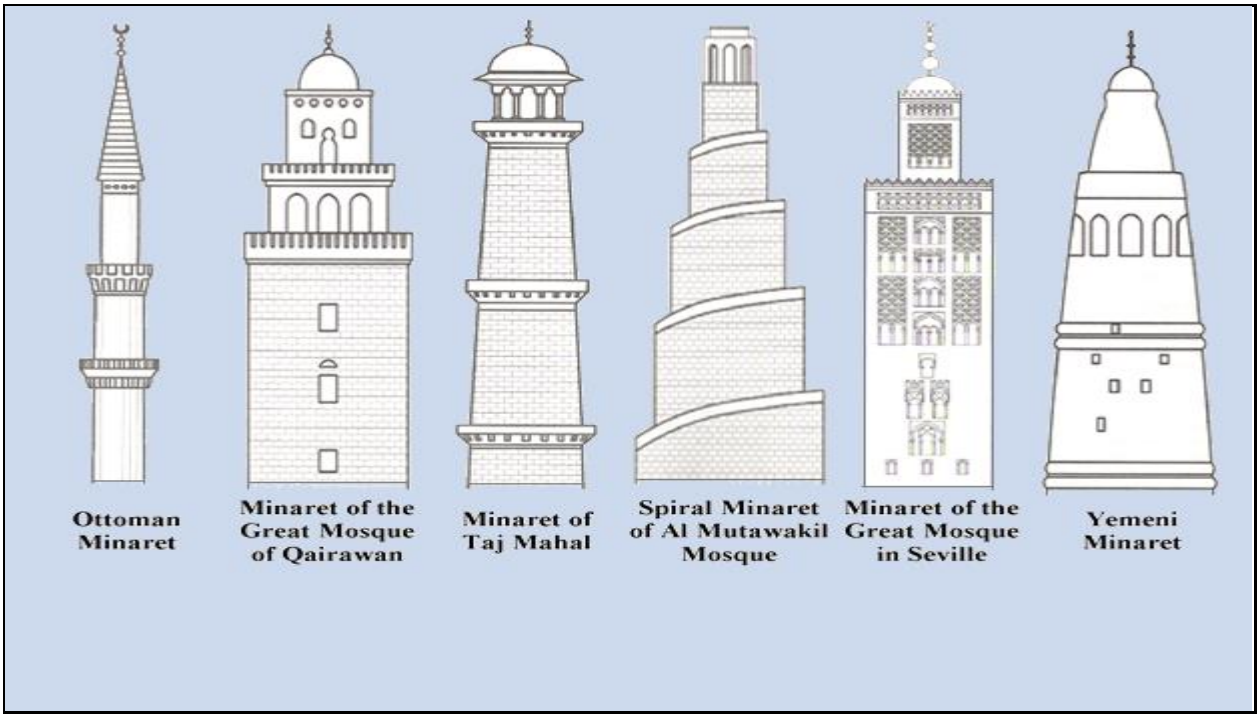
The original design of the maqsura involved the use of wooden screens decorated with carvings or interlocking turned pieces of wood (mashrabiyya), a mud-brick wall with spaces in it to allow the congregation to see the caliph as he led them in salat, and permanent stone structures.

DIKKA:

A dikka is a platform where the qadi repeats the sermon and prayer for those standing too far away from the minbar to clearly hear what is being said. It is generally found in larger masajid at the rear of the sanctuary, or in the courtyard, and along the same axis as the mihrab.



MINARET:


Ottoman Minaret
Minaret of the Great Mosque of Qairawan
Minaret of Taj Mahal
Spiral Minaret of Al Mutawakil Mosque
Minaret of the Great Mosque in Seville
Yemeni Minaret

A minaret is a tall, slender tower with a balcony that is either attached to or built nearby a masjid. Advocates of the minaret maintain that it serves a dual function; acting as both a landmark and a station from where the muezzin can broadcast the azan at great distances. Allegedly, it was not until at least seven centuries after the death of the Prophet Mohammed (P.B.U.H.) that the minaret became a universal feature of the grand masajid.

During the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed (P.B.U.H.), the call to prayer was performed by the muezzin from the rooftop. However, in modern times the azan for most prayers times across

the world is broadcasted today via loud-speakers. Furthermore, a masjid is generally equipped with a single minaret; however, some masajid have more. It is also important to note that minarets are actually regarded my some Islamic scholars as an innovation (bidah). A primary reason why minarets were regarded as an undesirable innovation is due to the fact that they were not built specifically for the purpose of broadcasting the azan. Initially, the muezzin broadcasted the azan from the rooftop of the masjid or from the streets below.

SAHN (COURTYARD):

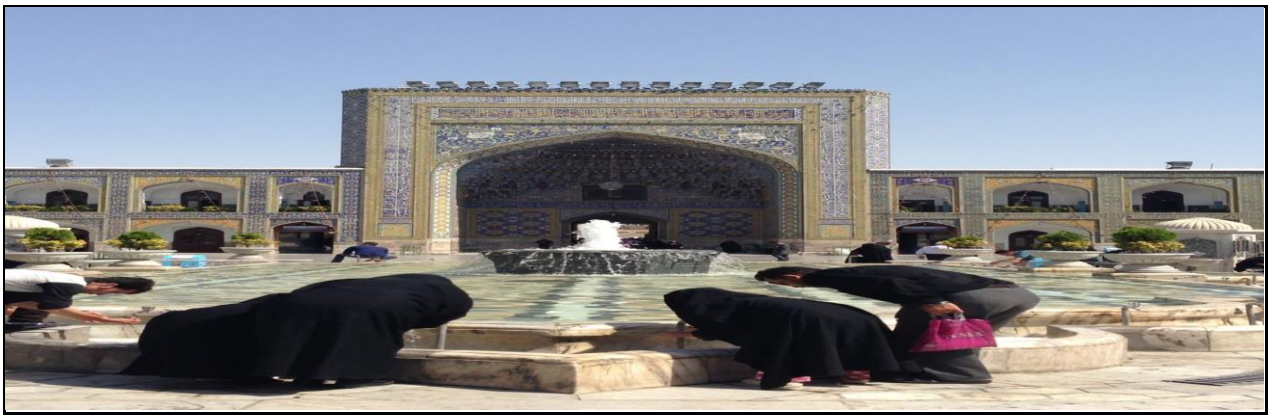
The Sahn is a massive courtyard used to accommodate excess members from the musalla of the masjid. A common feature of the

Sahn is a wall and an ablution fountain. Furthermore, it is also important to note that the sahn of the masjid is only regarded as being a part of the actual masjid whenever it is enclosed on all sides, attached to the structure of the masjid, and can be entered from the outside by way of a door. Therefore, if the courtyard is a separate structure from the masjid or is open to the highway, it will be considered a part of the outer yard and is not to be regarded as a part of the masjid.

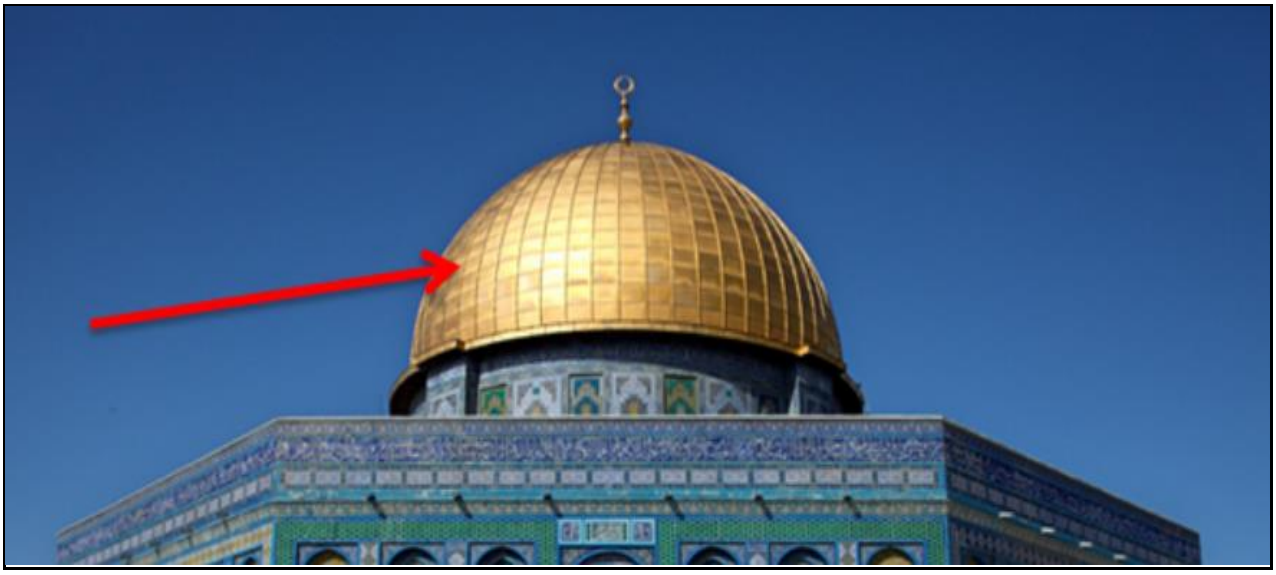
As such, any person in that particular area will not be counted as being within the actual masjid. Consequently, a person observing I'tikaf is not permitted to visit this area. Nevertheless, whenever the courtyard of the masjid is regarded as a part of the masjid structure, the same rulings that apply to the masjid will also apply to it.

ABLUTION FOUNTAIN:

Another feature common to the courtyard of the masjid are decorative pools and fountains which originally served the purpose of supplying water for ablution. However, today's masajid are generally equipped with indoor ablution stations. Furthermore, the pool of a masjid may, or may not have a fountain; however, when used for the purpose of ablution, it is more likely to have a fountain to allow a number of worshippers to wash simultaneously under the running water. The pool is typically positioned at, or near the center of the open courtyard

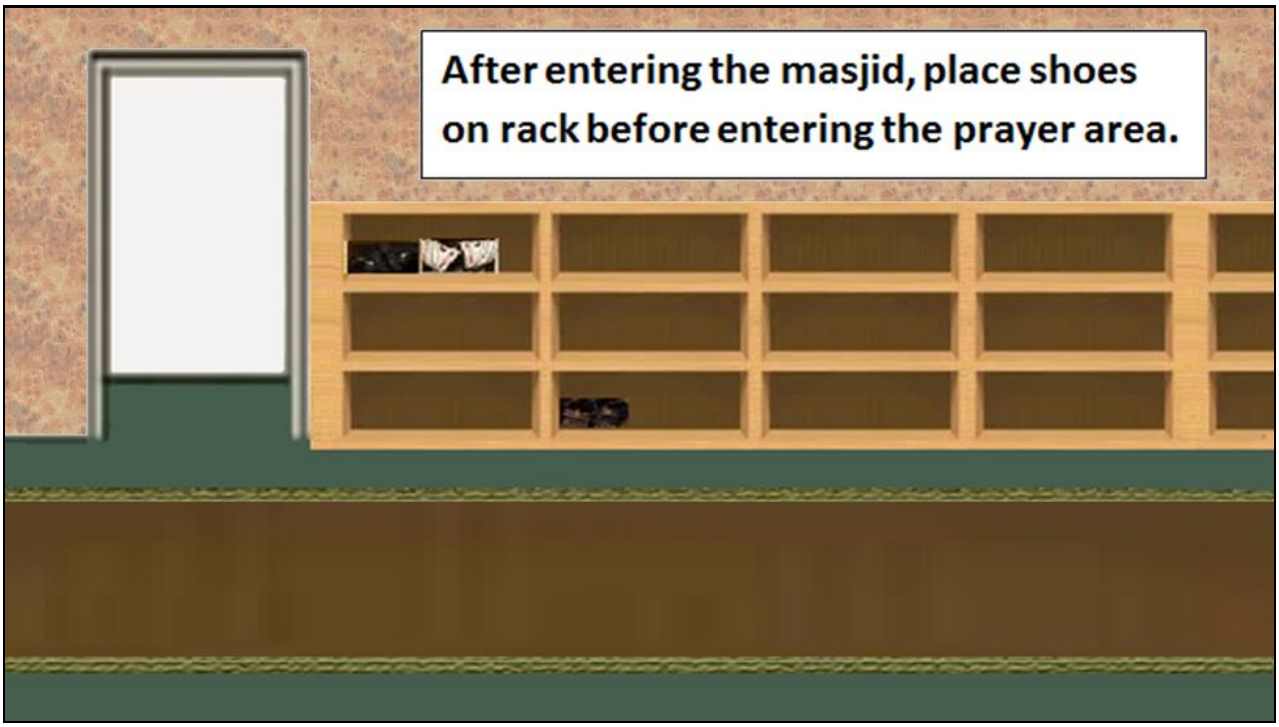


DOME :



Domes are among the most common feature that has been incorporated into the design of the masjid. The domes were originally placed directly above the musalla near the mihrab. However, over time, dome placement expanded to the point that they would cover the entire roof above the prayer hall. In addition to the main large dome positioned directly over the musalla, a number of masajid are equipped with multiple, often smaller, domes. The domed roof of a masjid serves two primary purposes; namely, to serve as a rudimentary form of air-conditioning which allows air to circulate around the prayer hall and to amplify the voice of the Imam so that he can be heard clearly by the congregation. Lastly, the shape of domes varies greatly; ranging from the traditional hemisphere-shaped design to the popularized onion-shaped style.

SHOE RACK:



The shoe and coat rack in a masjid are generally position near the entrance to the prayer hall. Furthermore, although it is permissible for a Muslim to perform salat in their shoes, it is customary to remove them in modern masajid with carpeted floors. This is a precautionary measure which ensures that

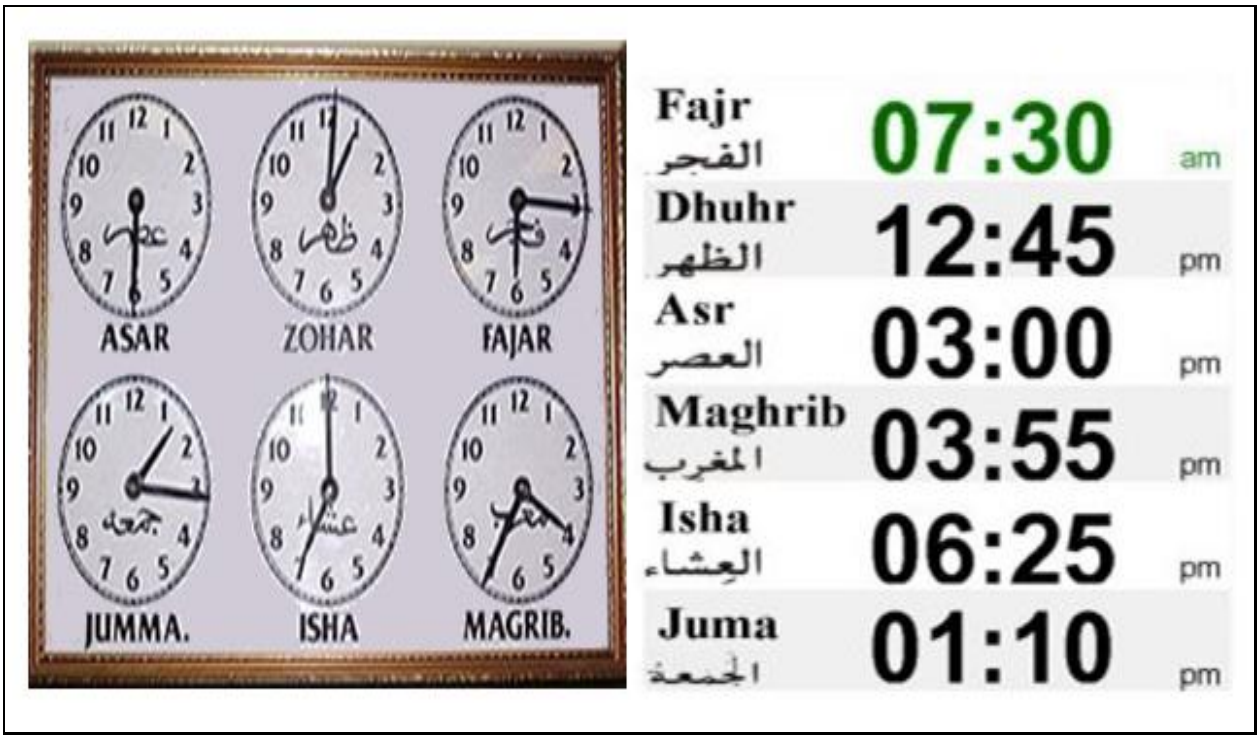
impurities from outside will not be transferred onto the clean carpet. The evidence for this ruling is the hadith of Abu Dawud wherein Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri reportedly said: "**Whilst the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) was leading his companions in prayer, he took off his shoes and placed them to his left. When the people saw that, they took off their shoes. When the Messenger of Allah had finished the prayer he said, 'What made you take off your shoes?' They said, 'We saw you take off your shoes, so we took off our shoes.' The Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H.) said: 'Jibreel (AS) came to me and told me that there was some dirt on them.' And he said: 'When one of you comes to the mosque, let him check his shoes, and if he seeds any dirt on them, let him wipe them and pray in them.'**" Therefore, in light of this evidence, it is permissible to pray in one's shoes; however, to avoid unnecessary conflict, it is strongly encouraged that one removes their shoes before entering the musalla unless wearing khuffain (a type of leather socks).

WUDU STATION:

All masajid are equipped with a station for worshippers to perform ablution. The designs vary greatly; however, all are equipped with a source of fresh clean water. The evidence for performing wudu to purify one's body for salat is Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:6) of the Quran which reads: **"O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of janabah,**

then purify yourselves. But if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and do not find water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and hands with it. Allah does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you that you may be grateful."

PRAYER CLOCKS AND POSTED PRAYER TIMES:



A masjid will generally be equipped with a clock that displays the times for the five daily salat and salatul-Jumuah. These useful tools will be positioned on the qibla wall. A number of masajid also provide worshippers with printed copies of the monthly prayer times to take with them.